

celebrate fresh, classic design

# TRADITIONAL HOME

May 2007

60  
fabulous  
spaces  
TO  
INSPIRE  
YOU

storage & style master-bath makeover

special kitchen section  
give yours personal style

plus, Trading Spaces alum **Laura Day** (her own city loft)  
and new-mom designers **Celerie Kemble, Alexa Hampton**

## art seen

In the hands of painter Page Laughlin, a brush is more powerful than a camera lens. *Untitled (Mirror, Mirror)*, painted in 2000, is in the permanent collection of the North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh.



BY DORIS ATHINEOS



# art decor

A North Carolina artist is inspired by wallpaper, porcelain, and chandeliers.

Like 17th-century Dutch painters before her, artist Page Laughlin prefers to stay at home. "I could spend years just painting patterned wallpaper," says this master of domestic detail. Her room portraits are investigations that transcend a mere recording of household possessions to become a kind of poetry of blurry colors, patterns, and textures. The paintings feel like fading memories. ▶

On the surface, Page grabs attention with a stunning set of props—among them sparkling crystal chandeliers, arched windows, portraits of lavishly draped imperious ancestors, and glinting gilt mirrors. She renders the objects in layer upon layer of pumped-up colors—deep blues, hot pinks, autumn yellows, and bleached whites. The lush and seductive way she pulls and pushes her artist tools across the canvas tells us that this is a painter who likes to handle oils. In places, the sumptuous surface is marred and distorted. Some areas appear scratched, as if she's digging below the surface in search of some eternal truth that won't shatter like the delicate blue-and-white porcelain so artfully arranged in the paintings.

"I find the rooms by leafing through home magazines," explains the soft-spoken artist, sitting in her sunny studio in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where she's a professor of fine art at Wake Forest University. A graduate of the prestigious Rhode Island School of Design, she doesn't repeat rooms exactly as she finds them. Often, she begins by purging. "I ▶

## picture this

"I love the wallpaper and the lone hand holding a bird," says Page of *Sketch (Bird in Hand)*. She based the painting (below, in a client's home) on a page in *Traditional Home's* 2002 Holiday issue showing a foyer (right) by Tulsa-based designer Charles Faudree.



## background

**Birthplace:** Richmond, Va., 1959

**Family:** Married to sculptor David Finn, with daughter, Parrish

**Home:** Winston-Salem, N.C.; summers in Sullivan County, N.Y.

**Public collections:** The Katzen Art Center at American University, Washington, D.C.; North Carolina Museum of Art

**Honors:** North Carolina Artist Fellowship, 2006; residency at Headlands Center for the Arts, Sausalito, Calif., 1990; Artistic Excellence award from the Boston Arts Festival, 1985

**Favorite painters:** Jan Vermeer (1632–1675), Gerhard Richter (b. 1932), Christopher Brown (b. 1951)

**Gallery:** Laughlin exhibit Sept. 3–Oct. 26 at Center of the Earth Gallery in Charlotte, N.C. (704/375-5756)

**Prices:** Paintings begin at \$3,000

**E-mail:** Laugh@wfu.edu



eliminate objects or remove a detail from one room and add it to another," says Page, who eschews minimalism. She has lifted chinoiserie wallpaper from a chic suburban living room and a pier mirror from a Park Avenue bedroom to create her own fantasy roomscapes.

Like an interior designer, she muses over fabrics, wallpaper, and furniture but isn't aiming for stylish interiors. She chooses colors, patterns, light, textures, art (paintings of paintings), and antiques to stir emotions. "First, I try to make beautiful paintings that others will find compelling. But I want you to see that it's just paint on surface—an illusion," explains Page, who,



like a magician, tricks the eye. But the painter doesn't try to cover her tracks. "I want the audience to see how the trick is performed. It's a metaphor for life. You learn not to believe the fairy tale, to balance it with reality. Allowing the illusion to exist totally intact is just too romantic for me." ▶

**Opposite top:** Bred for beauty, roses fascinate Page, who depicts them on a coffee table in *Untitled (Yellow Roses)* and close up (*above*), *Untitled (Yellow Roses II)*. **Opposite bottom:** "I often paint with the canvas resting directly on the floor," explains the artist. **Top:** Page depicts a chandelier and empty ginger jar in *Untitled (Chandelier)*.

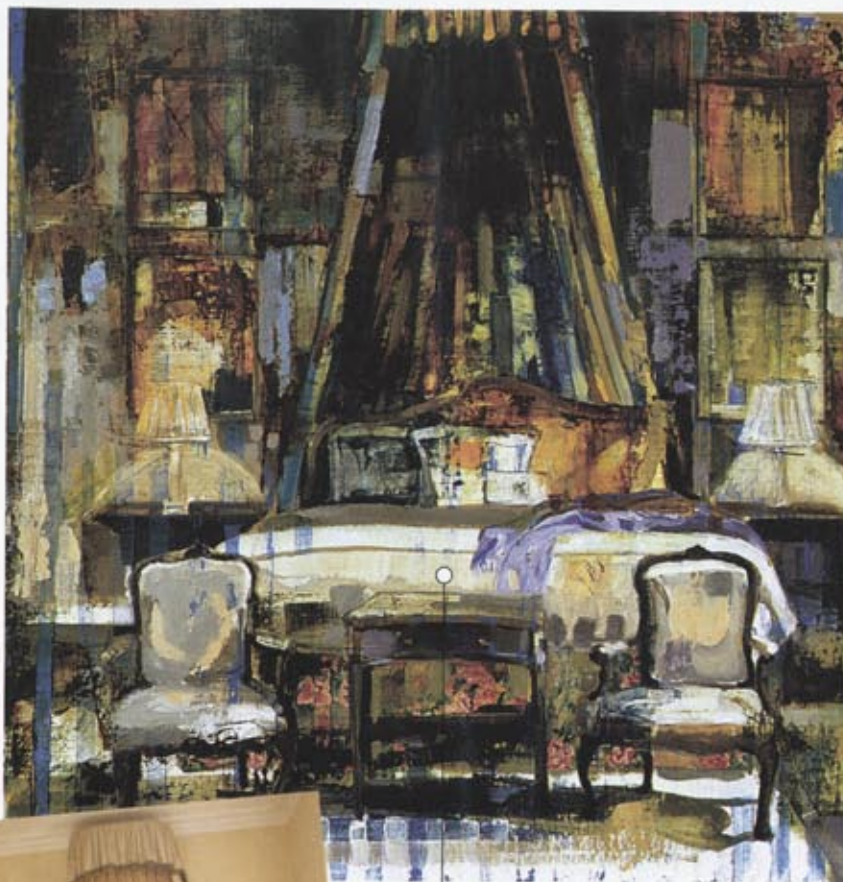


Once the objects are painted in place, Page grabs a palette knife or sandpaper and begins to dig deeper, scratching through an overstuffed sofa or squishy pillow “as a way of trying to archaeologically discover what’s buried underneath.” Armed with a loaded brush and scraper, she transforms the patterned wallpaper, carpets, or porcelain plates into dazzling abstractions as the composition turns from stylish interior into swatches of color and pattern.

Page’s paintings speak to our profound connection to home and to our deep desires—who we are and how we show ourselves to the world. ➤



*Untitled (Mantelpiece)*, 2004, zooms in on nude statuary. The detail shows Page digging below the surface.



## different Stokes

Inspired by a room designed by Stephanie Stokes and published in *Traditional Home* May 2002, Page painted *Untitled (Bedroom I)* in shades of ochre, sage, and lavender. What caught her eye? "To treat an intimate space so formally and symmetrically intrigued me," she says.

Her work hasn't come to the attention of a national audience yet, but one of New York City's legendary art dealers, the late Allan Stone, knew a good thing when he saw it. About 20 years ago, he purchased three works when the artist was fresh out of grad school. Stone first spotted her work while a juror for the Boston Arts Festival. "A few weeks later, he came from New York and spent the afternoon in my little studio in Providence," Page recalls. "It was magical, important, affirming, pivotal—one of those moments I'll never forget."

"Rooms express our unconscious longings," notes dealer Claudia Stone, Allan's daughter, who runs the Manhattan ▶



Page Laughlin's *Untitled (Roper Garden)* seduces viewers with a polished mahogany dining table and draped doorway that appear to melt into painterly patches of color.

## I find the rooms by leafing through home magazines.

—PAGE LAUGHLIN

gallery. "Layers and layers peer through Page's paintings, creating a mystery and lyricism that's intriguing. There's a feeling that you can't see the whole thing at once."

About eight years ago, Page abandoned painting impossibly beautiful fashion models as photographed for beauty ads in favor of creating scenes of domestic bliss. "There's something equally compelling about a flawless face and a stylish interior. They're both very seductive. Then one day I realized I was dealing with the same issue. Both stimulated the same response—an investigation of the beautiful surface to find out what's buried beneath." ■